AN

ESSAY

Hannah ON Slack

CRITICISM.

BY

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WITH THE

MESSIAH.

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THE ARGUMENT.

Introduction. That 'tis as great a fault to judge ill, as to write ill, and a more dangerous one to the public.—That a true Taſte is as rare to be found, as a true Genius.—That moſt men are born with ſome Taſte, but ſpoil'd by falſe Education.—The Multitude of Critics, and cauſes of them.—That we are to ſtudy our own Taſte, and know the Limits of it.—Nature the beſt guide of Judgment: Improv'd by Art and Rules, which are but methodiz'd Nature.—Rules deriv'd from the Practice of the Ancient Poets.—That therefore the Ancients are neceſſary to be ſtudy'd by a Critic, particularly Homer and Virgil.—Of Licenſes, and the uſe of them by the Ancients.—Reverence due to the Ancients, and praiſe of them.—Cauſes hindering a true Judgment, 1. Pride. 2. Imperfect Learning. 3. Judging by parts, and not by the whole.—Critics in Wit, Language, Verſification, only. 4. Being too hard to pleaſe, or too apt to admire. 5. Partiality—too much love to a Sect,—to the Ancients or Moderns. 6. Prejudice or Prevention. 7. Singularity. 8. Inconſtancy. 9. Party Spirit. 10. Envy.—Againſt Envy, and in praiſe of Good-nature.

—*When Severity is chiefly to be used by Critics.*—*Rules for the* Conduct *of* Manners *in a Critic*, 1. Candour,—Modesty,—Good-Breeding,—Sincerity, *and* Freedom *of Advice.* 2. *When one's Counsel is to be restrained.*—*Character of an* Incorrigible Poet.—*And of an* Impertinent Critic.—*Character of a* good Critic.—*The* History *of* Criticism, *and Characters of the best Critics*, Aristotle,—Horace,—Dionysius,—Petronius,—Quintilian,—Longinus.—*Of the Decay of Criticism, and its Revival.*—Erasmus,—Boileau,—*Lord* Roscommon, *&c.*—*Conclusion.*

AN ESSAY ON CRITICISM.

'TIS hard to ſay, if greater want of ſkill
Appear in writing or in judging ill;
But, of the two, leſs dang'rous is th' offence
To tire our patience, than miſlead our ſenſe.
Some few in that, but numbers err in this,
Ten cenſure wrong for one who writes amiſs;
A fool might once himſelf alone expoſe,
Now one in verſe makes many more in proſe.
'Tis with our Judgments as our watches, none
Go juſt alike, yet each believes his own.
In Poets as true Genius is but rare,
True Taſte as ſeldom is the Critic's ſhare;
Both muſt alike from Heav'n derive their light,
Theſe born to judge, as well as thoſe to write.
Let ſuch teach others who themſelves excel,
And cenſure freely who have written well.
Authors are partial to their wit, 'tis true,
But are not Critics to their judgment too?
Yet if we look more cloſely, we ſhall find
Moſt have the ſeeds of judgment in their mind:
Nature affords at leaſt a glimm'ring light;
The lines, tho' touch'd but faintly, are drawn right.

But as the ſlighteſt ſketch, if juſtly trac'd,
Is by ill-colouring but the more diſgrac'd,
So by falſe learning is good ſenſe defac'd:
Some are bewilder'd in the maze of ſchools,
And ſome made coxcombs Nature meant but fools.
In ſearch of wit theſe loſe their common ſenſe,
And then turn Critics in their own defence:
Each burns alike, who can, or cannot write,
Or with a Rival's, or an Eunuch's ſpite.
All fools have ſtill an itching to deride,
And fain would be upon the laughing ſide.
If *Mævius* ſcribble in *Apollo*'s ſpight,
There are, who judge ſtill worſe than he can write.
Some have at firſt for Wits, then Poets paſt,
Turn'd Critics next, and prov'd plain fools at laſt.
Some neither can for Wits nor Critics paſs,
As heavy mules are neither horſe nor aſs.
Thoſe half-learn'd witlings, num'rous in our iſle,
As half-form'd inſects on the banks of *Nile*;
Unfiniſh'd things, one knows not what to call,
Their generation's ſo equivocal:
To tell 'em, would a hundred tongues require,
Or one vain wit's, that might a hundred tire.
But you who ſeek to give and merit fame,
And juſtly bear a Critic's noble name,
Be ſure yourſelf and your own reach to know,
How far your genius, taſte, and learning go;
Launch not beyond your depth, but be diſcreet,
And mark that point where ſenſe and dullneſs meet.
Nature to all things fix'd the limits fit,
And wiſely curb'd proud man's pretending wit.
As on the land while here the ocean gains,
In other parts it leaves wide ſandy plains;
Thus in the ſoul while memory prevails,
The ſolid pow'r of underſtanding fails;
Where beams of warm imagination play,
The memory's ſoft figures melt away.

One ſcience only will one genius fit;
So vaſt is art, ſo narrow human wit:
Not only bounded to peculiar arts,
But oft' in thoſe confin'd to ſingle parts.
Like Kings we loſe the conqueſts gain'd before,
By vain ambition ſtill to make them more;
Each might his ſev'ral province well command,
Would all but ſtoop to what they underſtand.
First follow *Nature*, and your judgment frame,
By her juſt ſtandard, which is ſtill the ſame:
Unerring NATURE, ſtill divinely bright,
One clear, unchang'd, and univerſal light,
Life, force, and beauty, muſt to all impart,
At once the ſource, and end, and teſt of Art.
Art from that fund each juſt ſupply provides,
Works without ſhow, and without pomp preſides:
In ſome fair body thus th' informing ſoul
With ſpirits feeds, with vigour fills the whole,
Each motion guides, and ev'ry nerve ſuſtains;
Itſelf unſeen, but in th' effect, remains.
Some, to whom Heav'n in wit has been profuſe,
Want as much more, to turn it to its uſe;
For wit and judgment often are at ſtrife,
Tho' meant each other's aid, like man and wife.
'Tis more to guide, than ſpur the Muſe's ſteed;
Reſtrain his fury, than provoke his ſpeed;
The winged courſer, like a gen'rous horſe,
Shows moſt true mettle when you check his courſe.
Thoſe RULES of old diſcover'd, not devis'd,
Are Nature ſtill, but Nature methodiz'd;
Nature, like Liberty, is but reſtrain'd
By the ſame Laws which firſt herſelf ordain'd.
Hear how learn'd Greece her uſeful rule indites,
When to repreſs, and when indulge our flights:
High on Parnaſſus' top her ſons ſhe ſhew'd,
And pointed out thoſe arduous paths they trod;
Held from afar, aloft, th' immortal prize,
And urg'd the reſt by equal ſteps to riſe.

Juſt precepts thus from great examples giv'n,
She drew from them what they deriv'd from Heav'n.
The gen'rous Critic fann'd the Poet's fire,
And taught the world with reaſon to admire.
Then Criticiſm the muſes handmaid prov'd,
To dreſs her charms, and make her more belov'd:
But following wits from that intention ſtray'd,
Who cou'd not win the miſtreſs, woo'd the maid;
Againſt the Poets their own arms they turn'd,
Sure to hate moſt the men from whom they learn'd.
So modern 'Pothecaries, taught the art
By Doctor's Bills to play the Doctor's part,
Bold in the practice of miſtaken rules,
Preſcribe, apply, and call their maſters fools.
Some on the leaves of antient authors prey,
Nor time nor moths e'er ſpoil'd ſo much as they.
Some dryly plain, without invention's aid,
Write dull receipts how poems may be made.
Theſe leave the ſenſe, their learning to diſplay,
And thoſe explain the meaning quite away.
You then whoſe judgment the right courſe would ſteer,
Know well each ANCIENT's proper character;
His Fable, Subject, ſcope in every page;
Religion, Country, genius of his Age:
Without all thoſe at once before your eyes,
Cavil you may, but never criticize.
Be Homer's works your ſtudy and delight,
Read them by day, and meditate by night;
Thence form your judgment, thence your maxims bring,
And trace the Muſes upward to their ſpring.
Still with himſelf compar'd, his text peruſe;
And let your comment be the Mantuan Muſe.
When firſt young Maro in his boundleſs mind
A work t' outlaſt immortal Rome deſign'd,
Perhaps he ſeem'd above the Critic's law,
And but from Nature's fountains ſcorn'd to draw:

But when t'examine ev'ry part he came,
Nature and Homer were, he found, the ſame.
Convinc'd, amaz'd he checks the bold deſign;
And rules as ſtrict his labour'd work confine,
As if the Stagyrite o'erlook'd each line.
Learn hence for ancient rules a juſt eſteem;
To copy nature is to copy them.
Some beauties yet no Precepts can declare,
For there's a happineſs as well as care.
Muſic reſembles Poetry, in each
Are nameleſs graces which no methods teach,
And which a maſter-hand alone can reach.
If, where the rules not far enough extend,
(Since rules were made but to promote their end)
Some lucky Licence anſwers to the full
Th' intent propos'd, that Licence is a rule.
Thus Pegaſus, a nearer way to take,
May boldly deviate from the common track;
From vulgar bounds with brave diſorder part,
And ſnatch a grace beyond the reach of art,
Which without paſſing thro' the judgment, gains
The heart, and all its end at once attains.
In proſpects thus, ſome objects pleaſe our eyes,
Which out of nature's common order riſe,
The ſhapeleſs rock, or hanging precipice.
Great Wits ſometimes may gloriouſly offend,
And riſe to faults true Critics dare not mend.
But tho' the Ancients thus their rules invade,
(As Kings diſpenſe with laws themſelves have made)
Moderns beware! or if you muſt offend
Againſt the Precept, ne'er tranſgreſs its End;
Let it be ſeldom, and compell'd by need;
And have, at leaſt, their precedent to plead.
The Critic elſe proceeds without remorſe,
Seizes your fame, and puts his laws in force.
I know there are, to whoſe preſumptuous thoughts
Thoſe freer beauties, ev'n in them, ſeem faults.

Some figures monſtrous and miſ-ſhap'd appear,
Conſider'd ſingly, or beheld too near,
Which, but proportion'd to their light, or place,
Due diſtance reconciles to form and grace.
A prudent chief not always muſt diſplay
His pow'rs in equal ranks, and fair array,
But with th' occaſion and the place comply,
Conceal his force, nay ſeem ſometimes to fly.
Thoſe oft are ſtratagems which errors ſeem,
Nor is it Homer nods, but we that dream.
Still green with bays each ancient Altar ſtands,
Above the reach of ſacrilegious hands;
Secure from Flames, from Envy's fiercer rage,
Deſtructive War, and all-involving Age.
See, from each clime the learn'd their incenſe bring!
Hear, in all tongues conſenting Pæans ring!
In praiſe ſo juſt let ev'ry voice be join'd,
And fill the gen'ral chorus of mankind.
Hail, Bards triumphant! born in happier days;
Immortal heirs of univerſal praiſe!
Whoſe honours with increaſe of ages grow,
As ſtreams roll down, enlarging as they flow;
Nations unborn your mighty names ſhall ſound,
And worlds applaud that muſt not yet be found!
Oh may ſome ſpark of your celeſtial fire,
The laſt, the meaneſt of your ſons inſpire,
(That on weak wings, from far, purſues your flights;
Glows while he reads, but trembles as he writes)
To teach vain Wits a ſcience little known,
T' admire ſuperior ſenſe, and doubt their own!
Of all the Cauſes which conſpire to blind
Man's erring judgment, and miſguide the mind,
What the weak head with ſtrongeſt biaſs rules,
Is *Pride*, the never-failing vice of fools.
Whatever Nature has in worth deny'd,
She gives in large recruits of needful Pride;
For as in bodies, thus in ſouls, we find
What wants in blood and ſpirits, ſwell'd with wind;

Pride, where Wit fails, ſteps in to our defence,
And fills up all the mighty Void of ſenſe.
If once right reaſon drive that cloud away,
Truth breaks upon us with reſiſtleſs day.
Truſt not yourſelf; but your defects to know,
Make uſe of ev'ry friend —— and ev'ry foe.
A *little learning* is a dang'rous thing;
Drink deep, or taſte not the Pierian ſpring:
There ſhallow draughts intoxicate the brain,
And drinking largely ſobers us again.
Fir'd at firſt ſight with what the Muſe imparts,
In fearleſs youth we tempt the heights of Arts,
While from the bounded level of our mind,
Short views we take, nor ſee the lengths behind;
But, more advanc'd, behold with ſtrange ſurprize
New diſtant ſcenes of endleſs ſcience riſe!
So pleas'd at firſt the tow'ring Alps we try,
Mount o'er the vales, and ſeem to tread the ſky,
Th' eternal ſnows appear already paſt,
And the firſt clouds and mountains ſeem the laſt:
But, thoſe attain'd, we tremble to ſurvey
The growing labours of the lengthen'd way,
Th' increaſing proſpect tires our wand'ring eyes,
Hills peep o'er hills, and Alps on Alps ariſe!
A perfect Judge will read each work of Wit,
With the ſame ſpirit that its author writ:
Survey the WHOLE, nor ſeek ſlight faults to find
Where nature moves, and rapture warms the mind;
Nor loſe, for that malignant dull delight,
The gen'rous pleaſure to be charm'd with wit.
But in ſuch lays as neither ebb, nor flow,
Correctly cold, and regularly low,
That ſhunning faults, one quiet tenour keep;
We cannot blame indeed —— but we may ſleep.
In Wit, as Nature, what affects our hearts
Is not th' exactneſs of peculiar parts;
'Tis not a lip, or eye, we beauty call,
But the joint force and full reſult of all.

Thus when we view ſome well-proportion'd dome,
(The world's juſt wonder, and ev'n thine, O Rome!)
No ſingle parts unequally ſurprize,
All comes united to th' admiring eyes;
No monſtrous height, or breadth, or length appear;
The Whole at once is bold, and regular.

Whoever thinks a faultleſs piece to ſee,
Thinks what ne'er was, nor is, nor e'er ſhall be.
In ev'ry work regard the writer's End,
Since none can compaſs more than they intend;
And if the means be juſt, the conduct true,
Applauſe, in ſpight of trivial faults, is due.
As men of breeding, ſometimes men of wit,
T' avoid great errors, muſt the leſs commit:
Neglect the rules each verbal Critic lays,
For not to know ſome trifles, is a praiſe.
Moſt Critics, fond of ſome ſubſervient art,
Still make the Whole depend upon a Part:
They talk of principles, but notions prize,
And all to one lov'd Folly ſacrifice.

Once on a time, La Mancha's Knight, they ſay,
A certain Bard encount'ring on the way,
Diſcours'd in terms as juſt, with looks as ſage,
As e'er could Dennis, of the Grecian ſtage;
Concluding all were deſp'rate ſots and fools,
Who durſt depart from Ariſtotle's rules.
Our Author, happy in a judge ſo nice,
Produc'd his Play, and begg'd the Knight's advice;
Made him obſerve the ſubject, and the plot,
The manners, paſſions, unities; what not?
All which, exact to rule, were brought about,
Were but a Combat in the liſts left out.
"What! leave the Combat out?" exclaims the Knight;
Yes, or we muſt renounce the Stagyrite.
"Not ſo by Heav'n" (he anſwers in a rage)
"Knights, ſquires, and ſteeds, muſt enter on the ſtage."

So vaſt a throng the ſtage can ne'er contain.
" Then build a new, or act it in a plain."
Thus Critics, of leſs judgment than caprice,
Curious not knowing, not exact but nice,
Form ſhort Ideas; and offend in arts,
(As moſt in manners) by a love to parts.
Some to *Conceit* alone their taſte confine,
And glitt'ring thoughts ſtruck out at ev'ry line;
Pleas'd with a work where nothing's juſt or fit;
One glaring Chaos and wild heap of wit.
Poets like painters, thus, unſkill'd to trace
The naked nature and the living grace,
With gold and jewels cover ev'ry part,
And hide with ornaments their want of art.
True Wit is Nature to advantage dreſs'd,
What oft was thought, but ne'er ſo well expreſs'd;
Something, whoſe truth convinc'd at ſight we find,
That gives us back the image of our mind.
As ſhades more ſweetly recommend the light,
So modeſt plainneſs ſets off ſprightly wit.
For works may have more wit than does 'em good,
As bodies periſh thro' exceſs of blood.
Others for *Language* all their care expreſs,
And value books, as women men, for Dreſs:
Their praiſe is ſtill,—the Style is excellent:
The Senſe, they humbly take upon content.
Words are like leaves; and where they moſt abound,
Much fruit of ſenſe beneath is rarely found.
Falſe Eloquence, like the Priſmatic glaſs,
Its gaudy colours ſpreads on ev'ry place;
The face of nature we no more ſurvey,
All glares alike, without diſtinction gay:
But true Expreſſion, like th' unchanging Sun,
Clears, and improves whate'er it ſhines upon,
It gilds all objects, but it alters none.
Expreſſion is the dreſs of thought, and ſtill
Appears more decent, as more ſuitable;

A vile conceit in pompous words expreſs'd,
Is like a clown in regal purple dreſs'd:
For diff'rent ſtiles with diff'rent ſubjects ſort,
As ſeveral garbs with country, town, and court.
Some by old words to fame have made pretence,
Ancients in phraſe, meer moderns in their ſenſe:
Such labour'd nothings, in ſo ſtrange a ſtyle,
Amaze th' unlearn'd, and make the learned ſmile.
Unlucky, as Fungoſo in the Play,
Theſe ſparks with aukward vanity diſplay
What the fine gentleman wore yeſterday;
And but ſo mimic ancient wits at beſt,
As apes our grandſires, in their doublets dreſt.
In words, as faſhions, the ſame rule will hold;
Alike fantaſtic, if too new, or old;
Be not the firſt by whom the new are try'd,
Nor yet the laſt to lay the old aſide.

But moſt by *Numbers* judge a Poet's ſong,
And ſmooth or rough, with them, is right or wrong;
In the bright Muſe tho' thouſand charms conſpire,
Her Voice is all theſe tuneful fools admire;
Who haunt Parnaſſus but to pleaſe their ear,
Not mend their minds; as ſome to Church repair,
Not for the doctrine, but the muſic there.
Theſe equal ſyllables alone require,
Tho' oft the ear the open vowels tire;
While expletives their feeble aid do join;
And ten low words oft' creep in one dull line;
While they ring round the ſame unvary'd chimes,
With ſure returns of ſtill expected rhymes.
Where-e'er you find "the cooling weſtern breeze,"
In the next line, it "whiſpers thro' the trees;"
If cryſtal ſtreams "with pleaſing murmurs creep,"
The reader's threaten'd (not in vain) with "ſleep."
Then, at the laſt and only couplet fraught
With ſome unmeaning thing they call a thought,

A needleſs Alexandrine ends the ſong,
That, like a wounded ſnake, drags its ſlow length along.
Leave ſuch to tune their own dull rhimes, and know
What's roundly ſmooth, or languiſhingly ſlow;
And praiſe the eaſy vigour of a line,
Where Denham's ſtrength, and Waller's ſweetneſs join.
True eaſe in writing comes from art, not chance,
As thoſe move eaſieſt who have learn'd to dance.
'Tis not enough no harſhneſs gives offence,
The ſound muſt ſeem an Echo to the ſenſe:
Soft is the ſtrain when Zephyr gently blows,
And the ſmooth ſtream in ſmoother numbers flows;
But when loud ſurges laſh the ſounding ſhore,
The hoarſe, rough verſe ſhould like the torrent roar,
When Ajax ſtrives, ſome rock's vaſt weight to throw,
The line too labours, and the words move ſlow;
Not ſo, when ſwift Camilla ſcours the plain,
Flies o'er th' unbending corn, and ſkims along the main.
Hear how Timotheus' vary'd lays ſurprize,
And bid alternate paſſions fall and riſe!
While, at each change, the ſons of Libyan Jove
Now burns with glory, and then melts with love:
Now his fierce eyes with ſparkling fury glow,
Now ſighs ſteal out, and tears begin to flow:
Perſians and Greeks like turns of nature found,
And the World's victor ſtood ſubdu'd by Sound!
The pow'r of Muſic all our hearts allow,
And what Timotheus was, is Dryden now.
Avoid *Extremes*; and ſhun the fault of ſuch,
Who ſtill are pleas'd too little or too much.
At ev'ry trifle ſcorn to take offence,
That always ſhews great pride, or little ſenſe;
Thoſe heads, as ſtomachs, are not ſure the beſt,
Which nauſeate all, and nothing can digeſt.

Yet let not each gay Turn thy rapture move,
For fools admire, but men of ſenſe approve.
As things ſeem large which we thro' miſts deſcry,
Dulneſs is ever apt to magnify.

Some foreign writers, ſome our own deſpiſe:
The Ancients only, or the Modern's prize.
Thus Wit, like Faith, by each man is apply'd
To one ſmall ſect, and all are damn'd beſide.
Meanly they ſeek the bleſſing to confine,
And force that ſun but on a part to ſhine,
Which not alone the ſouthern wit ſublimes,
But ripens ſpirits in cold northern climes;
Which from the firſt has ſhone on ages paſt,
Enlights the preſent, and ſhall warm the laſt:
Tho' each may feel encreaſes and decays,
And ſee now clearer and now darker days.
Regard not then if Wit be old or new,
But blame the falſe, and value ſtill the true.

Some ne'er advance a Judgment of their own,
But catch the ſpreading notion of the town;
They reaſon and conclude by precedent,
And own ſtale nonſenſe which they ne'er invent.
Some judge of authors names, not works; and then
Nor praiſe nor blame the writings, but the men.
Of all this ſervile herd, the worſt is he
That in proud dulneſs joins with Quality.
A conſtant Critic at the great man's board,
To fetch and carry nonſenſe for my Lord.
What woful ſtuff this madrigal would be,
In ſome ſtarv'd hackney ſonneteer, or me?
But let a Lord once own the happy lines,
How the wit brightens! how the ſtile refines!
Before his ſacred name flies ev'ry fault,
And each exalted ſtanza teems with thought!

The Vulgar thus through Imitation err;
As oft' the Learn'd by being ſingular;
So much they ſcorn the croud, that if the throng
By chance go right, they purpoſely go wrong:

So Schiſmatics the plain believers quit,
And are but damn'd for having too much wit.
Some praiſe at morning what they blame at night;
But always think the laſt opinion right.
A Muſe by theſe is like a miſtreſs us'd,
This hour ſhe's idoliz'd, the next abus'd;
While their weak heads, like towns unfortify'd,
'Twixt ſenſe and nonſenſe daily change their ſide.
Aſk them the cauſe; they're wiſer ſtill, they ſay;
And ſtill to-morrow's wiſer than to-day.
We think our fathers fools, ſo wiſe we grow;
Our wiſer ſons, no doubt, will think us ſo.
Once ſchool-divines this zealous iſle o'er-ſpread;
Who knew moſt Sentences, was deepeſt read;
Faith, Goſpel, all, ſeem'd made to be diſputed,
And none had ſenſe enough to be confuted:
Scotiſts and Thomiſts, now, in peace remain,
Amidſt their kindred cobwebs in Duck-lane.
If Faith itſelf has different dreſſes worn,
What wonder modes in Wit ſhould take their turn?
Oft', leaving what is natural and fit,
The current folly proves the ready wit;
And authors think their reputation ſafe,
Which lives as long as fools are pleas'd to laugh.
Some valuing thoſe of their own ſide or mind,
Still make themſelves the meaſure of mankind:
Fondly we think we honour merit then,
When we but praiſe ourſelves in other men.
Parties in Wit attend on thoſe of State,
And public faction doubles private hate.
Pride, Malice, Folly, againſt Dryden roſe,
In various ſhapes of Parſons, Critics, Beaus;
But ſenſe ſurviv'd, when merry jeſts were paſt;
For riſing merit will buoy up at laſt.
Might he return, and bleſs once more our eyes,
New Blackmores and New Milbourns muſt ariſe:
Nay ſhould great Homer lift his awful head,
Zoilus again would ſtart up from the dead.

Envy will merit, as its ſhade, purſue;
But like a ſhadow, proves the ſubſtance true;
For envy'd Wit, like Sol eclips'd, makes known
Th' oppoſing body's groſſneſs, not its own.
When firſt that ſun too powerful beams diſplays,
It draws up vapours which obſcure its rays;
But ev'n thoſe clouds at laſt adorn its way,
Reflect new glories, and augment the day.
Be thou the firſt true merit to befriend;
His praiſe is loſt, who ſtays 'till all commend.
Short is the date, alas, of modern rhymes,
And 'tis but juſt to let them live betimes.
No longer now that golden age appears,
When Patriarch-wits ſurviv'd a thouſand years:
Now length of Fame (our ſecond life) is loſt,
And bare threeſcore is all ev'n that can boaſt;
Our ſons their fathers failling language ſee,
And ſuch as Chaucer is, ſhall Dryden be.
So when the faithful pencil has deſign'd
Some bright Idea of the maſter's mind,
Where a new world leaps out at his command,
And ready Nature waits upon his hand;
When the ripe colours ſoften and unite,
And ſweetly melt into juſt ſhade and light,
When mellowing years their full perfection give,
And each bold figure juſt begins to live;
The treach'rous colours the fair art betray,
And all the bright creation fades away!
Unhappy Wit, like moſt miſtaken things,
Attones not for that envy which it brings.
In youth alone its empty praiſe we boaſt,
But ſoon the ſhort-liv'd vanity is loſt:
Like ſome fair flow'r the early ſpring ſupplies,
That gayly blooms, but ev'n in blooming dies.
What is this Wit, which muſt our cares employ?
The owner's wife, that other men enjoy;
Then moſt our trouble ſtill when moſt admir'd,
And ſtill the more we give, the more requir'd;

Whoſe fame with pains we guard, but loſe with eaſe,
Sure ſome to vex, but never all to pleaſe;
'Tis what the vicious fear, the virtuous ſhun,
By fools 'tis hated, and by knaves undone!
If Wit ſo much from Ign'rance undergo,
Ah let not Learning too commence its foe!
Of old, thoſe met rewards who could excel,
And ſuch were prais'd who but endeavour'd well:
Tho' triumphs were to gen'rals only due,
Crowns were reſerv'd to grace the ſoldiers too.
Now, they who reach Parnaſſus' lofty crown,
Employ their pains to ſpurn ſome others down;
And while ſelf-love each jealous writer rules,
Contending wits become the ſport of fools:
But ſtill the worſt with moſt regret commend,
For each ill Author is as bad a Friend.
To what baſe ends, and by what abject ways,
Are mortals urg'd thro' ſacred luſt of praiſe!
Ah ne'er ſo dire a thirſt of glory boaſt,
Nor in the Critic let the Man be loſt.
Good-nature and good-ſenſe muſt ever join;
To err is human, to forgive, divine.
But if in noble minds ſome dregs remain
Nor yet purg'd off, of ſpleen and ſour diſdain;
Diſcharge that rage on more provoking crimes,
Nor fear a dearth in theſe flagitious times.
No pardon vile Obſcenity ſhould find,
Tho' wit and art conſpire to move your mind;
But Dullneſs with obſcenity muſt prove
As ſhameful ſure as Impotence in love.
In the fat age of pleaſure, wealth, and eaſe,
Sprung the rank weed, and thriv'd with large increaſe;
When love was all an eaſy Monarch's care;
Seldom at council, never in a war:
Jilts rul'd the ſtate, and ſtateſmen farces writ;
Nay Wits had penſions, and young Lords had wit:
The Fair ſate panting at a Courtier's play,
And not a Maſk went unimprov'd away:

The modeſt fan was lifted up no more,
And Virgins ſmil'd at what they bluſh'd before.
The following licence of a Foreign reign
Did all the dregs of bold Socinus drain;
Then unbelieving Prieſts reform'd the nation,
And taught more pleaſant methods of ſalvation;
Where Heav'n's free ſubjects might their rights diſpute,
Leſt God himſelf ſhould ſeem too abſolute;
Pulpits their ſacred ſatire learn'd to ſpare,
And Vice admir'd to find a flatt'rer there!
Encourag'd thus, Wit's Titans brav'd the ſkies,
And the preſs groan'd with licens'd blaſphemies.
Theſe monſters, Critics! with your darts engage,
Here point your thunder, and exhauſt your rage!
Yet ſhun their fault, who, ſcandalouſly nice,
Will needs miſtake an author into vice;
All ſeems infected that th' infected ſpy,
As all looks yellow to the jaundic'd eye.

LEARN then what MORALS Critics ought to ſhew,
For 'tis but half a Judge's taſk, to know.
'Tis not enough, taſte, judgment, learning, join;
In all you ſpeak, let truth and candour ſhine:
That not alone what to your ſenſe is due
All may allow; but ſeek your friendſhip too.
Be ſilent always when you doubt your ſenſe;
And ſpeak, tho' ſure, with ſeeming diffidence:
Some poſitive perſiſting fops we know,
Who, if once wrong, will needs be always ſo;
But you, with pleaſure own your errors paſt,
And make each day a Critic on the laſt.
'Tis not enough, your counſel ſtill be true;
Blunt truths more miſchief than nice falſhoods do;
Men muſt be taught as if you taught them not,
And things unknown propos'd as things forgot.
Without Good Breeding, truth is diſapprov'd;
That only makes ſuperior ſenſe belov'd.

Be niggards of advice on no pretence;
For the worſt avarice is that of ſenſe.
With mean complacence ne'er betray your truſt,
Nor be ſo civil as to prove unjuſt.
Fear not the anger of the wiſe to raiſe;
Thoſe beſt can bear reproof, who merit praiſe.
'Twere well might Critics ſtill this freedom take;
But Appius reddens at each word you ſpeak,
And ſtares, tremendous, with a threat'ning eye,
Like ſome fierce Tyrant in old tapeſtry.
Fear moſt to tax an Honourable fool,
Whoſe right it is, uncenſur'd to be dull;
Such, without wit, are Poets when they pleaſe,
As without learning they can take Degrees.
Leave dang'rous truths to unſucceſsful Satyrs,
And flattery to fulſome Dedicators,
Whom, when they praiſe, the world believes no more,
Than when they promiſe to give ſcribbling o'er.
'Tis beſt ſometimes your cenſure to reſtrain,
And charitably let the dull be vain:
Your ſilence there is better than your ſpite,
For who can rail ſo long as they can write?
Still humming on, their drowzy courſe they keep,
And laſh'd ſo long, like tops, are laſh'd aſleep.
Falſe ſteps but help them to renew the race,
As, after ſtumbling, Jades will mend their pace.
What crouds of theſe, impenitently bold,
In ſounds and jingling ſyllables grown old,
Still run on Poets, in a raging vein,
Ev'n to the dregs and ſqueezings of the brain;
Strain out the laſt dull droopings of their ſenſe,
And rhyme with all the rage of Impotence.
Such ſhameleſs Bards we have; and yet 'tis true,
There are as mad, abandon'd Critics too.
The bookful blockhead, ignorantly read,
With loads of learned lumber in his head,

With his own tongue ſtill edifies his ears,
And always liſt'ning to himſelf appears.
All books he reads, and all he reads aſſails,
From Dryden's Fables down to Durfey's Tales.
With him, moſt authors ſteal their works, or buy;
GARTH did not write his own Diſpenſary.
Name a new Play, and he's the Poet's friend,
Nay ſhow'd his faults—but when wou'd Poets mend?
No place ſo ſacred from ſuch fops is barr'd,
Nor is Paul's church more ſafe than Paul's church yard:
Nay, fly to Altars; there they'll take you dead:
For Fools ruſh in where Angels fear to tread.
Diſtruſtful ſenſe with modeſt caution ſpeaks,
It ſtill looks home, and ſhort excurſions makes;
But rattling nonſenſe in full vollies breaks,
And never ſhock'd, and never turn'd aſide,
Burſts out, reſiſtleſs, with a thund'ring tide.
But where's the man, who counſel can beſtow,
Still pleas'd to teach, and yet not proud to know?
Unbiaſs'd, or by favour, or by ſpite:
Not dully prepoſſeſs'd, nor blindly right;
Tho' learn'd, well-bred; and tho' well-bred, ſincere;
Modeſtly bold, and humanly ſevere:
Who to a friend his faults can freely ſhow,
And gladly praiſe the merit of a foe?
Bleſt with a taſte exact, yet unconfin'd;
A knowledge both of books and human kind;
Gen'rous converſe; a ſoul exempt from pride;
And love to praiſe, with reaſon on his ſide?
Such once were Critics; ſuch the happy few,
Athens and Rome in better ages knew.
The mighty Stagyrite firſt left the ſhore,
Spread all his ſails, and durſt the deeps explore;
He ſteer'd ſecurely, and diſcover'd far,
Led by the light of the Mæonian Star,

Poets, a race long unconfin'd, and free,
Still fond and proud of ſavage liberty,
Receiv'd his laws; and ſtood convinc'd 'twas fit
Who conquer'd Nature, ſhould preſide o'er Wit.
Horace ſtill charms with graceful negligence,
And without method talks us into ſenſe,
Will, like a friend, familiarly convey
The trueſt notions in the eaſieſt way.
He, who ſupreme in judgment, as in wit,
Might boldly cenſure, as he boldly writ,
Yet judg'd with coolneſs, tho' he ſung with fire;
His Precepts teach but what his works inſpire.
Our Critics take a contrary extreme,
They judge with fury, but they write with fle'me:
Nor ſuffers Horace more in wrong Tranſlations
By Wits, than Critics in as wrong Quotations.
See Dionyſius Homer's thoughts refine,
And call new beauties forth from ev'ry line!
Fancy and art in gay Petronius pleaſe,
The ſcholar's learning, with the courtier's eaſe.
In grave Quintilian's copious work, we find
The juſteſt rules, and cleareſt method join'd:
Thus uſeful arms in magazines we place,
All rang'd in order, and diſpos'd with grace;
But leſs to pleaſe the eye, than arm the hand,
Still fit for uſe, and ready at command.
Thee, bold Longinus! all the Nine inſpire,
And bleſs their Critic with a Poet's fire.
An ardent Judge, who zealous in his truſt,
With warmth gives ſentence, yet is always juſt;
Whoſe own example ſtrengthens all his laws,
And is himſelf that great Sublime he draws.
Thus long ſucceeding Critics juſtly reign'd,
Licence repreſs'd, and uſeful laws ordain'd.
Learning and Rome alike in empire grew:
And Arts ſtill follow'd where her Eagles flew:
From the ſame foes, at laſt, both felt their doom,
And the ſame age ſaw Learning fall, and Rome.

With Tyranny, then Superſtition join'd,
As that the body, this enſlav'd the mind;
Much was believ'd, but little underſtood,
And to be dull was conſtru'd to be good;
A ſecond deluge Learning thus o'er-run,
And the Monks finiſh'd what the Goths begun.

At length Eraſmus, that great, injur'd name,
(The glory of the Prieſthood, and the ſhame!)
Stem'd the wild torrent of a barb'rous age,
And drove thoſe holy Vandals off the ſtage.

But ſee! each Muſe, in LEO's golden days,
Starts from her trance, and trims her wither'd bays!
Rome's ancient Genius, o'er its ruins ſpread,
Shakes off the duſt, and rears his rev'rend head.
Then Sculpture and her ſiſter-arts revive;
Stones leap'd to form, and rocks began to live;
With ſweeter notes each riſing Temple rung;
A Raphael painted, and a Vida ſung.
Immortal Vida; on whoſe honour'd brow
The Poet's bays and Critic's ivy grow:
Cremona now ſhall ever boaſt thy name,
As next in place to Mantua, next in fame!

But ſoon by impious arms from Latium chas'd,
Their ancient bounds the baniſh'd Muſes paſs'd;
Thence Arts o'er all the northern world advance;
But Critic learning flouriſh'd moſt in France:
The rules, a nation born to ſerve, obeys;
And Boileau ſtill in right of Horace ſways.
But we, brave Britons, foreign laws deſpis'd,
And kept unconquer'd, and unciviliz'd;
Fierce for the liberties of wit, and bold,
We ſtill defy'd the Romans, as of old.
Yet ſome there were, among the ſounder few
Of thoſe who leſs preſum'd, and better knew,
Who durſt aſſert the juſter ancient cauſe,
And here reſtor'd Wit's fundamental laws.
Such was the Muſe, whoſe rules and practice tell,
"Nature's chief Maſter-piece is writing well."

Such was Roſcommon, not more learn'd than good,
With manners gen'rous as his noble blood;
To him the wit of Greece and Rome was known,
And ev'ry author's merit, but his own.
Such late was Walſh — the Muſe's judge and friend,
Who juſtly knew to blame or to commend;
To failings mild, but zealous for deſert;
The cleareſt head, and the ſincereſt heart.
This humble praiſe, lamented ſhade! receive,
This praiſe at leaſt a grateful Muſe may give;
The Muſe, whoſe early voice you taught to ſing,
Preſcrib'd her heights, and prun'd her tender wing,
(Her guide now loſt) no more attempts to riſe,
But in low numbers ſhort excurſions tries:
Content, if hence th' unlearn'd their wants may view,
The learn'd reflect on what before they knew:
Careleſs of cenſure, nor too fond of fame;
Still pleas'd to praiſe, yet not afraid to blame;
Averſe alike to flatter, or offend;
Not free from faults, nor yet too vain to mend.

MESSIAH.

A SACRED ECLOGUE.

In Imitation of VIRGIL's POLLIO.

YE nymphs of Solyma! begin the ſong:
To heav'nly themes ſublimer ſtrains belong.
The moſſy fountains, and the ſylvan ſhades,
The dreams of Pindus, and the Aonian maids,
Delight no more —— O Thou my voice inſpire,
Who touch'd Iſaiah's hallow'd lips with fire!
Rapt into future times, the bard begun:
A virgin ſhall conceive, a virgin bear a ſon!
From Jeſſe's root behold a branch ariſe,
Whoſe ſacred flow'r with fragrance fills the ſkies.
Th' æthereal ſpirit o'er its leaves ſhall move,
And on its top deſcends the myſtic dove.
Ye heav'n's! from high the dewy nectar pour,
And in ſoft ſilence ſhed the kindly ſhow'r!
The ſick and weak the healing plant ſhall aid,
From ſtorms a ſhelter, and from heat a ſhade.
All crimes ſhall ceaſe, and ancient fraud ſhall fail;
Returning Juſtice lift aloft her ſcale;
Peace o'er the world her olive wand extend,
And white-rob'd Innocence from heav'n deſcend.
Swift fly the years, and riſe th' expected morn!
Oh ſpring to light, auſpicious babe, be born!
See nature haſtes her earlieſt wreaths to bring,
With all the incenſe of the breathing ſpring:
See lofty Lebanon his head advance,
See nodding foreſts on the mountains dance:
See ſpicy clouds from lowly Saron riſe,
And Carmel's flow'ry top perfume the ſkies!
Hark! a glad voice the lonely deſert chears;
Prepare the way! a God, a God appears:
A God, a God! the vocal hills reply,
The rocks proclaim th' approaching Deity.
Lo, earth receives him from the bending ſkies!
Sink down, ye mountains, and, ye valleys, riſe;

With heads declin'd, ye cedars, homage pay!
Be ſmooth, ye rocks; ye rapid floods, give way!
The Saviour comes! by ancient bards foretold:
Hear him, ye deaf, and all ye blind, behold!
He from thick films ſhall purge the viſual ray,
And on the ſightleſs eye-ball pour the day:
'Tis he th' obſtructed paths of ſound ſhall clear,
And bid new muſic charm th' unfolding ear:
The dumb ſhall ſing, the lame his crutch forego,
And leap exulting like the bounding roe.
No ſigh, no murmur the wide world ſhall hear,
From ev'ry face he wipes off ev'ry tear.
In adamantine chains ſhall Death be bound,
And hell's grim tyrant feel th' eternal wound.
As the good ſhepherd tends his fleecy care,
Seeks freſheſt paſture and the pureſt air,
Explores the loſt, the wand'ring ſheep directs,
By day o'erſees them, and by night protects;
The tender lambs he raiſes in his arms,
Feeds from his hand, and in his boſom warms:
Thus ſhall mankind his guardian care engage,
The promis'd father of the future age.
No more ſhall nation againſt nation riſe,
Nor ardent warriors meet with hateful eyes.
Nor fields with gleaming ſteel be cover'd o'er,
The brazen trumpets kindle rage no more;
But uſeleſs lances into ſcythes ſhall bend,
And the broad faulchion in a ploughſhare end.
Then palaces ſhall riſe; the joyful ſon
Shall finiſh what his ſhort-liv'd ſire begun;
Their vines a ſhadow to their race ſhall yield,
And the ſame hand that ſow'd, ſhall reap the field.
The ſwain in barren deſerts with ſurpriſe,
Sees lillies ſpring, and ſudden verdure riſe,
And ſtarts amidſt the thirſty wilds to hear
New falls of water murm'ring in his ear.
On rifted rocks, the dragon's late abodes,
The green reed trembles and the bulruſh nods.

Waſte ſandy valleys, once perplex'd with thorn,
The ſpiry fir and ſhapely box adorn;
To leafleſs ſhrubs the flow'ring palm ſucceed,
And od'rous myrtle to the noiſome ſheed.
The lambs with wolves ſhall graze the verdant mead,
And boys in flow'ry banks the tiger lead!
The ſteer and lion at one crib ſhall meet,
And harmleſs ſerpents lick the pilgrim's feet.
The ſmiling infant in his hand ſhall take
The creſted baſiliſk and ſpeckled ſnake,
Pleas'd the green luſtre of the ſcales ſurvey,
And with their forky tongue ſhall innocently play.
Riſe, crown'd with light, imperial Salem, riſe!
Exalt thy tow'ry head, and lift thy eyes!
See, a long race thy ſpacious courts adorn;
See future ſons, and daughters yet unborn,
In crouding ranks on ev'ry ſide ariſe,
Demanding life, impatient for the ſkies!
See barb'rous nations at thy gates attend,
Walk in thy light, and in thy temple bend;
See thy bright altars throng'd with proſtrate kings,
And heap'd with products of Sabæan ſprings!
For thee Idume's ſpicy foreſts blow,
And ſeeds of gold in Ophir's mountains glow.
See heav'n its ſparkling portals wide diſplay,
And break upon thee in a flood of day.
No more the riſing ſun ſhall gild the morn,
Nor ev'ning Cynthia fill her ſilver horn;
But loſt, diſſolv'd in thy ſuperior rays,
One tide of glory, one unclouded blaze
O'erflow thy courts: the Light himſelf ſhall ſhine
Reveal'd, and God's eternal day be thine!
The ſeas ſhall waſte, the ſkies in ſmoke decay,
Rocks fall to duſt, and mountains melt away;
But fix'd his word, his ſaving pow'r remains:
Thy realm for ever laſts, thy own MESSIAH reigns!

FINIS.